

# Federal highway bill would mean \$97 million for local roadwork

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The House Friday celebrated passage of a federal transportation bill that earmarks \$12.9 million for locally congested roads and \$88 million for a Stearns Road bridge, the first across the Fox River since 1994.

"The projects we have in there are good projects that are needed in a county that is facing massive traffic congestion," said Rich Carter, spokesman for Congressman Don Manzullo, an Egan Republican.

The bill earmarks \$4 million for a \$12.1 million project already under construction to widen Algonquin Road to four lanes between Route 31 and Randall Road.

Other local projects include \$5 million for widening Miller Road, the Miller Road bridge and River Road from two to four lanes between Route 31 and Route 120, around McHenry.

The bill was great news for Marc Munnaretto, a McHenry County board member who resides in Algonquin, in the heart of growing traffic congestion.

"We've long held the opinion that growth here in McHenry County has far outstripped the expansion of the infrastructure," he said. "That \$4 million will go a long way to relieving that traffic problem."

Huntley would get \$3.9 million to widen Route 47 to five lanes between Kreutzer and Reed roads.

"We need more, but this is a

good start," said Chuck Sass, Huntley's village president.

Sass hopes the pledge of federal money will in turn prompt state legislators to devote more cash to finish the expansion, which still could cost another \$10 million.

"We don't really know what the ultimate cost is, but it's a definite big chunk," Sass said of the federal dollars. "I think the state realizes the importance of 47."

As envisioned, the Stearns Road bridge project in St. Charles Township would extend Stearns Road from where it currently ends just west of the Kane-DuPage county border west to the intersection of Randall and McDonald roads.

The approximately 4.5-mile corridor would be four lanes wide with intersections at Route 25, Route 31 and McLean Boulevard. The total cost is estimated at \$120 million.

The \$88 million might be enough to foot the bill because the county already has received about \$25 million from the federal government in past years for ongoing Stearns Road bridge work. State money also has been pledged to the project.

Officials said the bridge could be open as early as 2008.

Part of the bill includes \$7.2 billion for the state of Illinois — a 28 percent increase over 1998's transportation bill — to be doled out on road projects all over the state by Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

That's why Carter said federal and state legislators must work

to bring large portions of that cash to McHenry County, in order to fully fund these projects to completion, along with many others on the drawing board.

"The governor needs to spend a significant amount of money up here," Carter said. "Transportation funding is McHenry County's number one need."

Even though he doubts any of the local projects will be nixed from the bill, it isn't law yet.

The White House says the House's \$275 billion transportation bill is too big and has threatened to veto it over provisions to make it bigger after the November election.

The House voted 357-65 to approve the massive legislation, which boosts funding for federal highway, transit and safety programs by nearly \$60 billion over six years.

The House bill must be reconciled with a \$318 billion Senate version, already approved and also under a veto threat, before a final measure can be sent to the president.

President Bush has proposed a \$256 billion program and has wrangled for months with fellow Republicans over the price tag in his election-year drive to hold down spending.

Stop-gap legislation to fund road construction and mass transit programs at last year's levels expires at the end of April. The old highway bill expired in September 2003.

• Daily Herald wire services contributed to this report.